



State of California
Respiratory Care Board
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Inquiry:

I am a respiratory therapist and I would like to know where I can find information on our rights as a therapist when a situation may arise where I don't agree with a doctor's order and do not feel right carrying the order out. When I notified the doctor he would not D/C the order, but I don't feel comfortable carrying the order out. My supervisor agrees with me and a meeting with doctor is called, but I would like to know what laws protect us as a therapist?

Response:

The situation you described is one many of us have encounter in our professional career. However, in order for us as licensed practitioners to not follow an order, we must be able to prove that the patient would be harmed if this order is followed. Many times these disagreements are merely a difference of professional opinion and not a situation of patient safety.

Administratively, you have some options that afford you the opportunity to try and resolve this matter while still maintaining your professionalism. One would be to research any internal process that may be in place in your organization. Speak with the director of your department, the medical director of the department and potentially the chief of that service (Surgery, Medicine etc.). Usually one of these avenues should resolve this issue. However, I must emphasize, should you go the road of refusing to follow an order, that you must be prepared to prove that the patient would have unequivocally been harmed.

Reference # 2004-C-04